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LEONARDO BRUNI, *De primo bello punico* (anonymous Italian translation)

In Italian, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Central Italy (Florence), c. 1450-1475

i (parchment) + 95 folios on parchment, fair quality with some original holes and darkened hair sides, modern foliation in pencil, top, outer corner recto (collation, i-ix^{to} x^o [6, a pastedown]), horizontal catchwords, bottom inner margin, no signatures, ruled in blind with the top two and bottom two horizontal rules full across, double full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings in outer and top margins on some folios, (justification, 128-123 x 76-75 mm.), written below the top line in a good humanistic script in twenty-seven or twenty-six long lines, red rubrics, three burnished gold initials, seven- to six lines, ff. 2, 34, and 62, with white vine decoration on dark blue grounds, infilled with pink, green and blue highlighted with white dots, six-line burnished gold initial, f. 1, with similar white vine decoration that continues into a full-length border in the inner and bottom margins, with a short extension into the upper margin, containing a laurel wreath in the bottom margin, with a coat of arms (repainted), flanked by two putti, terminating in gold rayed disks set into fine ink-scrolls, later full-page miniature on the verso of the front flyleaf, now detached, of two figures (described below), flyleaf, now detached, with holes and frayed edges, f. 1, border in the inner margin damaged and mostly rubbed away, faces of putti, bottom margin, retouched, small hole in the middle of the text, ff. 1-2rv, initial, f. 2, slightly damaged in the inner margin, but overall in good condition with large margins. Bound in old red velvet over wooden boards, perhaps eighteenth-century, spine with three raised bands, marks from clasps remain, upper and lower covers, front cover and spine now with worn spots, edges gilt and gauffered, repaired, with the spine and front cover redone, with the original velvet laid down, later paper pastedown added in the front. Dimensions 197 x 143 mm.

Everything about this manuscript speaks to the aesthetic and intellectual vitality of Renaissance Italy. The combination of its humanistic script and white vine decoration are wonderful examples of Renaissance book design. Its text is by Leonardo Bruni, historian, statesman, and spokesperson for civic humanism, and best-selling author of 15th-century Italy. The numerous Latin and Italian manuscripts of this work testify to its popularity; and the full history of the Italian translations of this text deserve further study. Only four manuscripts of this text are listed in the Schoenberg database in catalogues dating after 1950.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Central Italy c. 1450-75, as indicated by the decoration and script; and although Florence seems the most likely place of origin, it is also possible that the manuscript was copied in Rome. The coat-of-arms of the original owner of the manuscript, enclosed in a laurel wreath in the lower margin of the border on f. 1, have unfortunately been painted

over and are indiscernible (the coat-of-arms now visible does not appear to conform to the usual heraldic conventions).

2. f. 95v, "Ex bibliotheca <...> dominos de <?> valguarnera miles. Fatta anno christi 1543," perhaps Giovanni de Girolamo Valguarnera (d. 1554), eighth Barone of Asaro and the first Conte di Asaro, in Sicily; the Valguarnera family was the ruling family in the region of Sicily near Asaro and Caropepe from the end of the fourteenth century. Many of the important battles of the first Punic war were fought in Sicily, and an early owner added "Palermo" in the margins of this manuscript when the city is mentioned in the text.
3. Note in German in pencil, inside front cover; typed description in English glued to the front flyleaf (now detached).
4. Purchased by Emil Offenbacher, June 9, 1953.
5. Belonged to Cornelius J. Hauck (1893-1967), a noted bibliophile who assembled a distinguished collection illustrating the history of the book from 1945-1965; his collection was donated to the Cincinnati Museum Center in 1966 (formerly the Cincinnati Historical Society; printed bookplate, inside front cover: "Cornelius J. Hauck Collection, Cincinnati, Ohio").

TEXT

ff. 1- 95, *Proemio di messere Lionardo d'arrezzo sopra il libro del primo bello punico composto dallui e poi translato in uulgarè per uno suo amico*, incipit, "Parra forse a molti che io uada dietro a cose troppo antiche auendo E primamente combacterono per mare"; f. 2, *Cominca il libro del primo bello punico composito da messere Lionardo darrezzo in latino uulgarizzato poi primo suo amico, libro primo*, incipit, "A prima guerra punica cioe la prima guerra laquale fui ... Et [sic] non molto da poi tolto loro le possessioni constretti furono in gran parte habandonare il paese." *Finis*. [f. 95v, blank, with later inscription, see above].

Leonardo Bruni's *Commentarii de primo bello punico* ("Commentary on the First Punic War"), was written c. 1418-19 (date of the work is discussed in Hans Baron, "Progress in Bruni Scholarship: Apropos of F. P. Luiso's Studi su l'Epistolario di Leonardo Bruni," *Speculum* 56 (1981), pp. 835-6). It is an account of the first Punic War, the first of the three major wars between the Roman Empire and Carthage in 264-241 B.C., based on Polybius, *Histories*, Books I.7-II.34. Polybius (204 B.C.-122 B.C.), was a Greek author, who lived in exile in Rome for seventeen years. Bruni recognized that Polybius's account of the first Punic War filled the gap left by the loss of the second decade of Livy's history.

The manuscript evidence testifies to its tremendous popularity and to the importance of both the Latin and Italian versions. The handlist of Bruni's manuscripts by James Hankins, 1997, lists 146 Latin manuscripts and 120 manuscripts in Italian (in addition to two manuscripts in Catalan, one in Spanish, and 27 in French). Our manuscript is not included in the *Repetorium Brunianum*. The text was printed twelve times before 1600 in Italian (as well as in French and German); the first printing was *De primo bello punico*, in Venice, c. 1471, by the Printer of Basilius, *De vita solitaria* (see Hain-Copinger-Reichling, 1560, Proctor, 5653, Goff, B-1256, GW, 5604). The first Latin edition of

1498 appeared after seven editions in Italian. The translation was edited by Antonio Ceruti in 1878 (see Leonardo Bruni, *La prima guerra punica, testo di lingua riprodotto su un codice a penna dell' Ambrosiana pel Dott. Antonio Ceruti*, Bologna, G. Romagnoli, 1878).

This translation of Bruni's work into Italian is by an anonymous translator, whom Bruni calls in his preface, "uno suo amico"; in other manuscripts the translator is called Bruni's "dear friend." James Hankins has suggested that the translation may be by Carlo, the son of one of Bruni's closest friends, Nicola di Vieri de' Medici, who copied Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional MS Iluminados 41 (see Hankins, *Repertorium Brunianum*, no. 1184), since this manuscript is both a magnificently illuminated presentation copy of the translation and the earliest copy, dated 1434 (discussed in Hankins, 2006, pp. 141-142, note 16). This translation was by far the most popular of the Italian versions, but four other Italian translations are listed in the manuscripts included in the *Repertorium Brunianum*; see nos. 1363 (P. C. Decembrio), 1693 (anon. C), 1706 (anon. B), 2440 (anon. C), and 2598 (Giovanni Bernardo Fiorentino). To my knowledge, there has been no extensive modern study of the textual traditions of these translations.

Listed in the Schoenberg data base are thirty-seven manuscripts, twenty in Italian, three in French, one in Catalan, and presumably the remainder in Latin. Despite the obvious popularity of this text, the Database lists only four copies in recent catalogues since 1950, including this one.

Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), or Leonardo Bruni Aretino, was the leading civic humanist of the Italian Renaissance. He served as the apostolic secretary to four Popes (1405-1414), and as the Chancellor of Florence from 1427-44. He was famous in his lifetime as a translator, orator and historian; his works survive in numerous manuscripts and early printed editions, testifying to his popularity during the fifteenth century. He was born of a poor family in Arezzo and arrived in Florence in the early 1390s. Once in Florence, he became one of Coluccio Salutati's followers and, instead of studying law, devoted himself to the study of classical history and literature. He studied Greek with the Byzantine exile, Manuel Chrysoloras, and many of his works are translations from Greek into Latin.

The present work is based on a work by the Greek historian Polybius. Although some discussions of this work describe it as a translation of Polybius's *Histories* (Book I.7-II.34), Bruni drew on other sources including Strabo, Thucydides, Florus, and Plutarch, rearranged and rephrased Polybius, and retold the story from a Roman perspective. Although Bruni's scholarship focused on reviving Latin literary culture and encouraging the emulation of the ancient world among the ruling elite in Florence, he recognized the importance of reaching a broader audience in the vernacular. Many of his works circulated in both Italian and Latin (see Hankins, 2006, Appendix, pp. 144-146, listed below).

ILLUSTRATION

The manuscript begins with a six-line burnished gold initial with white vine decoration that extends from the initial into the inner bottom and partly into the top margins, forming a very handsome frontispiece (now damaged in the inner margin). This style of decoration is a hallmark of Italian Renaissance illumination, and survives in countless humanist manuscripts, especially from Florence and Rome. The remaining major divisions of the text begin with similar burnished gold initials with white vines decoration on ff. 2, 24 and 62; all the initials are on grounds of deep blue, with pink and green, highlighted with white dots. The initials on ff. 24 and 62 are in pristine condition, and testify to the high quality of this manuscript; they are skillfully executed, and the colors remain vivid and attractive.

In the bottom margin on f. 1, there is a laurel wreath with a coat-of-arms (now repainted), flanked by two putti; the putti are shown upright, standing within the vines on either side of the laurel wreath. They are plump, attractive little figures, with some muscular definition. The putti found in manuscripts by the Florentine artist, Ricciardo di Nanni (active 1449-80), can be compared to those found in this manuscript (see Garzelli, 1985, plate 138, of Paris, BnF, MS lat. 6376). This is not to suggest that these manuscripts were illuminated by the same artists, but the similarity suggests they may have been painted in the same milieu.

A manuscript with similar white vinestem initials is London, British Library, MS Burney 145, copied in Rome or Florence, c. 1450-64 (see <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIID=3385>).

A curiosity of this manuscript is the full-page miniature, now on a detached leaf, but originally on the verso of the front flyleaf, facing f. 1, showing two figures standing in a landscape, presumably personifications of Rome and Carthage. It seems possible that the miniature was added at the time the manuscript was rebound.

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